

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
ICA-11 HA-05 AID-05 /090 W
-----019768 141312Z /43

R 132118Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0950
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
AMCONSUL BELIZE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GUATEMALA 4136

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, GT, BH
SUBJECT: BELIZE: SINCE LUCAS' INAUGURATION

REF: GUATEMALA 3865 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY. PERIOD SINCE PRESIDENT LUCAS' INAUGURAL HAS SEEN
UNFORTUNATE BUT PERHAPS INEVITABLE STRAIN DEVELOP
BETWEEN VICE PRESIDENT VILLAGRAN KRAMER AND FOREIGN
MINISTER CASTILLO VALDEZ OVER BELIZE POLICY-MAKING
PREROGATIVES, AND THE STILLBIRTH OF VILLAGRAN'S
PROPOSAL TO HOLD THE NEXT NEGOTIATING ROUND IN BARBADOS,
BUT NO SHIF IN THE GOG'S DECLARED INTENTION TO SEEK A
NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT RECGNIZING THE INTERESTS OF BOTH
SIDES. FONMIN HAS PRIVATELY STRESSED TO US HIS
INTEREST IN KEEPING BELIZE RHETORIC AT LOW
PITCH, AND HE HAS TOLD BRITISH HE FAVORS WASHINGTON AS
MEETING PLACE, PREFERABLY BEFORE END OF JULY.
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END SUMMARY.

1. OAS AMBASSADOR CASTILLO ARRIOLA'S REVELATION (REFTEL)
THAT GOG HAD PROPOSED BARBADOS AS NEXT ROUND NEGOTIATING
SITE GENERATED CONSIDERABLE CONTROVERSY HERE IN SUCCEEDING
DAYS. TO REPORTERS JULY 3, VICE PRESIDENT VILLAGRAN
KRAMER DEFENDED PROPOSAL WITH COMMENT THAT IT HAD BEEN

"HUMILIATING" FOR GUATEMALA TO HAVE HELD PREVIOUS CONVERSATIONS IN "COUNTRIES OUTSIDE THE AREA," MEANING THE UNITED STATES. ASKED BY REPORTERS HIS REACTION, FORMER FONMIN MOLINA TOOK ISSUE: WASHINGTON CONVERSATIONS HAD COMPELLED USG TO TAKE GREATER INTEREST IN THE ISSUE THAN MIGHT OTHERWISE HAVE BEEN THE CASE AND THIS HAD BEEN POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT.

2. VILLAGRAN'S BARBADOS PROPOSAL MET STRONG CRITICISM FROM MLN, NOW THE MAIN OPPOSITION PARTY. MLN LABELLED BARBADOS A "BRITISH COLONY." IT ALSO CRITICIZED IDEA OF HOLDING CONVERSATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES "WHICH HAD DECLARED ITSELF A SUPPORTER OF BELIZEAN INDEPENDENCE." (THIS WAS AN APPARENT ALLUSION TO THE GARBLED VERSION OF AMBASSADOR MCGEE'S REMARKS LAST WEEK.) MLN SUGGESTED HONDURAS AND COSTA RICA AS APPROPRIATE "NEUTRAL" SITES. (IN FACT, VILLAGRAN TOLD BRITISH CONSUL JULY 3 THAT COSA RICAN GOVERNMENT HAD ALREADY CONSENTED TO HOLDING SECOND ROUND IN SAN JOSE.)

3. WITH VILLAGRAN'S BARBADOS INITIATIVE AS BACKDROP, FONMIN CASTILLO VALDEZ JULY 9 AS MUCH AS ACCUSED THE VICE PRESIDENT OF POACHING. HE TOLD EL GRAFICO HE NOT ONLY AGREED WITH THE MLN'S VIEW OF BARBADOS AS A NEGOTIATING SITE, BUT ALSO SAW NOTHING HUMILIATING ABOUT

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HOLDING BELIZE MEETINGS IN THE U.S., "A FRIENDLY, DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY." IN A FULL DRESS PRESS CONFERENCE THE NEXT DAY, CASTILLO WENT SO FAR AS TO READ ALOUD THE CONSTITUTIONAL ARTICLES DEFINING THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL PURVIEW. HE ADDED THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAD TAKEN SO MUCH INITIATIVE WITH THE BARBADOS GOVERNMENT (WHICH, STRICTLY SPEAKING, IS PROBABLY TRUE), BUT HOPED TALKS WOULD RESUME "AS SOON AS POSSIBLE." VILLAGRAN GOT IN WHAT MAY NOT BE THE LAST WORD BY PUBLICLY CHIDING CASTILLO FOR FALLING VICTIM TO "WOUNDED VANITY." WITH HIS GIFT FOR PUNGENT METAPHOR, HE CAUTIONED THAT "FIREMEN SHOULDN'T STAND ON THE HOSE." HE HOPED THE CHAPTER WAS NOW CLOSED. (CASTILLO POINTEDLY TOLD UK CONSUL AT OUR JULY 4 RECEPTION THAT WHEN HE NEEDED TO DISCUSS FOREIGN AFFAIRS, HE SHOULD SEE THE FOREIGN MINISTER.)

4. DURING JULY 12 COURTESY CALL ON FONMIN, THE AMBASSADOR SOUGHT TO ELICIT CASTILLO'S VIEWS ON WHETHER THESGOG IS PREPARED TO APPROACH A BELIZE SETTLEMENT ALONG THE SAME LINES AS THE LAST ADMINISTRATION. CASTILLO DID NOT MEET THE QUESTION SQUARELY.

RATHER HE STRESSED THE NEED TO REDUCE TEMPRATURES ON BOTH SIDES. HE CONFIRMED THAT THE BRITISH EXPECTED TO ANNOUNCE MOMENTARILY THE REMOVAL OF TWO HARRIERS AND SOME MILITARY PERSONNEL FR OM THE BELIZE AIRPORT. IN RETURN, THE GOG WOULD ISSUE A STATEMENT RECOGNIZING THE UK'S ACTION AS PROVIDING A CONSTRUCTIVE ATMOSPHERE FOR TALKS. HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT HE WAS NOT PREPARED TO PLACE FLL TRUST IN THE BRITISH. THE GOG MUST KEEP ITS GUARD UP. BELIZE INDIPEENDENCE ON TERMS UNACCEPT- ABLE TO GUATEMALA, HE SAID, WOULD BE "DISASTROUS." IT WOULD CALL FORTH GUATEMALAN RETALIATION AND POSSIBLY PROVOKE THE GOVERNMENT'S FALL. HE CONCLUDED BY ASKING FOR US HELP AS WE GO ALONG ON BELIZE ISSUE; AMBASSADOR NOTED WE HAD TRIED TO BE HELPFUL IN THE PAST AND WOULD CONFIDENTIAL

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WANT TO CONTINUE TO HELP WHEN WE COULD IN THE FUTURE.

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ICA-11 HA-05 AID-05 /090 W

-----019708 141313Z /43

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5. THE FONMIN WAS NOT COMPLETELY CONVINCING AS HE TRIED TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT HIS PROBLEMS WITH THE

VICE PRESIDENT WERE TO SOME EXTENT ARTIFICIAL. HE HAD BECOME PERSUADED, AFTER THE MLN STATEMENT AND AFTER CONFERRING WITH HIS OWN PARTY (PID), THAT THE BARBADOS SITE INITIATIVE WAS DOMESTICALLY UNTENABLE. HIS PUBLIC JURISDICTIONAL CHAFING, HE WOULD HAD HAD US BELIEVE, WAS A WAY OF GETTING THE GOG OUT FROM UNDER A POLITICAL EMBARRASSMENT. CASTILLO WAS TOLD UK CONSUL HE FAVORS WASHINGTON SITE FOR NEXT ROUND, PREFERABLY BEFORE END OF JULY.

6. COMMENT: SEVERAL THINGS ARE EVIDENT FROM ALL THIS: (A) THE BARBADOS INITIATIVE IS DEAD ON THE GUTEMALAN SIDE (THIS IS ALSO UK CONSUL'S IMPRESSION) , WHATEVER MIGHT HAVE BEEN ITS FATE IN BRIDGETOWN; (B) THE GOG'S PUBLIC APPROACH TO BELIZE REMAINS ONE OF MODERATION IF NOT CIRCUMSPECTION; AND (C) THERE IS PERSONAL TENSION
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BETWEEN THE FLAMBOYANT VILLAGRAN AND THE FONMIN, WHO SEEMS UNDERSTANDABLY DETERMINED NOT TO TAKE A BACK SEAT WHEN IT COMES TO GUATEMALA'S PREMIER FOREIGN POLICY CONCERN. SO FAR VILLAGRAN HAS BEEN A CONSTRUCTIVE INFLUENCE ON BELIZE. HE ALSO HAS AN APPRECIATION OF INTERNATIONAL FACTS OF LIVE UNRIVALED IN THE NEW ADMINISTRATION. IT WOULD BE A SHAME IF THE LUCAS ADMINISTRATION'S GOOD BEGINNINGS ON BELIZE WERE TO RUN AGROUND OVER PERSONAL CONFLICTS. WHERE LUCAS STANDS IN THIS UNSEEMLY IN-HOUSE SQUABBLE IS NOT AT ALL CLEAR, FOR IT WAS LUCAS HIMSELF, ONLY A FEW DAYS AGO AT HIS MAIDEN PRESS CONFERENCE, WHO IN THE TELE- VIZED PRESENCE OF CASTILLO AND THE OTHER CABINET MINISTERS, DEFERRED TO THE VICE PRESIDENT WHEN THE BELIZE QUESTION CAME UP.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INAUGURATION, POLICIES, CENTRAL GOVERNMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 13 jul 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978GUATEM04136
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780289-0134
Format: TEL
From: GUATEMALA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780765/aaaaccxm.tel
Line Count: 208
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 64ba7e76-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 GUATEMALA 3865
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2024603
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BELIZE: SINCE LUCAS' INAUGURATION
TAGS: PBOR, GT, BH, (LUCAS GARCIA, FERNANDO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/64ba7e76-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014